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Brasilia, October 20 (RHC)-- The senator leading a congressional investigation into Brazil's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic has recommended that President Jair Bolsonaro face criminal charges – including homicide – over a catalogue of alleged government errors that led to the deaths of thousands of

people.

A nearly 1,200-page draft document prepared by opposition Senator Renan Calheiros for a Senate committee that discussed the matter late on Tuesday began an inquiry in April which alleges that Bolsonaro turned down early opportunities for the government to acquire vaccines, delaying Brazil's inoculation campaign at the cost of an estimated 95,000 lives.

The report says Bolsonaro was guided "by an unfounded belief in the theory of herd immunity by natural infection and the existence of a treatment." "Without the vaccine, deaths would be stratospheric, as they turned out to be," the report adds.

The draft report, which recommends the president be indicted on 11 charges, from charlatanism and inciting crime up to homicide and genocide against the Indigenous community, still needs to be voted on by the 11-member Senate committee and could still be vetoed and altered.

Three senators on the commission were lobbying for the removal of the homicide and genocide charges, the Associated Press news agency reported, citing five senators. Any charges would have to be brought by Brazil's prosecutor – a military general appointed by Bolsonaro.

Earlier on Tuesday, Bolsonaro dismissed the inquiry as a "joke" and told supporters he was not concerned about it. He has remained defiant despite the increasing criticism. The presidency and Health Ministry did not immediately respond to requests for comment from the Reuters news agency.

The inquiry, which heard tearful testimony from relatives of the dead, also said charges should be filed against dozens of people including three of Bolsonaro's sons who are also in politics. The report alleges they spread misinformation that incentivised "non-compliance with sanitary measures to contain the pandemic."

More than 600,000 people have died in Brazil from COVID-19, the second-highest death toll worldwide after the United States. Bolsonaro has been widely criticised by public health experts for railing against lockdowns, frequently refusing to wear a mask in public and declaring he has not been vaccinated. He has also pushed unproven remedies for the illness.

The report says Bolsonaro is "principally responsible for the government's errors committed during the COVID-19 pandemic" and that he acted against the advice of his Health Ministry in supporting the use of unproven treatments.

The pandemic has already had an effect on Bolsonaro with less than half of Brazilians still saying they support the right-wing president.

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